

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SCCT-02 IO-14 SY-04 USSS-00 FBIE-00 A-01

SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00 CCO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00

PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01

PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20 AID-20 NIC-01 OPR-02 DRC-01 /126 W

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O 290135Z SEP 74 ZFF-6

FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 1582

INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS NIACT IMMEDIATE

USUN NEW YORK NIACT IMMEDIATE 0282

AMEMBASSY MEXICO CITY NIACT IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 SANTO DOMINGO 3981

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: ASEC, PINT

SUBJECT: ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT KIDNAPPING SITUATION

1. SUMMARY: PRESIDENT BALAGUER IS UNDOUBTEDLY EMBARRASED TO FIND THAT THE MAN HE RELEASED FROM PRISON JUST LAST JANUARY AGAINST ADVICE OF MILITARY LEADERS AND SOME POLITICAL ASSOCIATES HAS NOW COMMITTED ANOTHER SENSATIONAL ACT OF TERRORISM. HOWEVER, MAIN ELEMENT IN PRESIDENT'S APPROACH TO HANDLING OF SITUATION EVIDENTLY IS HIS STRONG CONVICTION THAT KIDNAPPERS UNDERSTAND THAT THEIR SUCCESS AND SAFETY DEPEND ON SAFETY OF HOSTAGES AND THAT THEY ARE NOT PRONE TO SACRIFICE THEIR LIVES AND THOSE OF THEIR COLLEAGUES RASHLY. WITH THIS CONVICTION, HE APPARENTLY INTENDS TO LET TIME WORK ITS WEARING EFFECTS ON KIDNAPPERS AND TO ASSESS SITUATION CAREFULLY BEFORE TAKING DECISIVE ACTION.

2. IT THEREFORE DOES NOT APPEAR LIKELY THAT GODR WILL RESORT TO ASSAULT OR OTHER PRECIPITOUS ACTION AGAINST KIDNAPPERS UNLESS THERE ARE INDICATIONS OF MISTREATMENT OF PRISONERS. HOWEVER, WE MAY EXPECT HARD POSTURE TOWARD TERRORISTS'

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DEMANDS, INFLUENCED BY ATTITUDE OF MILITARY AND BY REALIZATION

THAT LARGE CONCESSIONS TO TERRORIST DEMANDS COULD BE INTERPRETED AS WEAKNESS OF GOVERNMENT IN MEETING LEFTIST PRESSURES AND COULD ENCOURAGE FURTHER ACTS OF VIOLENCE BY EXTREMIST GROUPS. BEHAVIOR OF CAPTORS IS MORE DIFFICULT TO ASSESS, GIVEN RECORD OF EMOTIONAL INSTABILITY OF MENDEZ VARGAS. REGARDLESS OF OUTCOME OF CURRENT SITUATION, GODR WILL LIKELY MOVE QUICKLY TO SUPPRESS EXTREME LEFT IN DR AFTER CURRENT SITUATION IS RESOLVED.

3. THE GOVERNMENT NOW SEEMS TO BE SEEKING A "BANGKOK SOLUTION". IF THE CAPTORS START KILLING THE HOSTAGES ONE BY ONE, CONTRARY TO THE GOVERNMENT'S JUDGMENT, HUTCHISON, AS THE MOST VALUABLE, WOULD PROBABLY NOT BE AMONG THE FIRST. INITIATION OF SUCH A COURSE BY THE CAPTORS WOULD ENHANCE US ABILITY TO QUESTION THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY BUT IT WOULD ALSO MAKE THE MILITARY LESS DISPOSED TO BE CONCILIATORY. THE GOVERNMENT'S CONVICTION THAT CAPTORS WILL GIVE UP THEIR DEMANDS WITHOUT HARMING HOSTAGES SEEMS TOO SANGUINE. THE LIVES OF HUTCHISON AND THE OTHER HOSTAGES DO NOT NOW SEEM TO BE IN IMMINENT DANGER BUT AS THE PRESSURES INCREASE WITH PASSAGE OF TIME, THE EMOTIONALLY UNSTABLE MENDEZ VARGAS MIGHT POSSIBLY LASH OUT IN A BRUTAL MANNER. END SUMMARY.

4. RADHAMES MENDEZ VARGAS ACHIEVED INSTANT NOTORIETY AND "MACHISMO" IN 1968 BY HIJACKING CARACAS-BOUND VIASA AIRCRAFT TO CUBA IN PROTEST AGAINST THE GODR INTERNAL SECURITY PRACTICES. UPON RETURN TO DR, HE WAS TRIED AND SENTENCED TO 20 YEARS IN PRISON, A SENTENCE LATER REDUCED TO 10 YEARS. LAST JANUARY 12 PRESIDENT BALAGUER RESPONDED TO PLEAS OF MENDEZ VARGAS' MOTHER AND FRIENDS, WHO ALLEGED MENDEZ' HEALTH WAS DETERIORATING, BY ORDERING HIS CONDITIONAL RELEASE. MENDEZ VARGAS' FREEDOM WAS GRANTED OVER OBJECTION OF MILITARY LEADERS AND SOME POLITICAL ASSOCIATES OF PRESIDENT.

5. PRESIDENT IN MEETING WITH AMBASSADOR LAST NIGHT EXPRESSED CONVICTION HE KNOWS THE CHARACTER OF THE TERRORISTS THOROUGHLY. HE BELIEVES THAT DESPITE THEIR AUDACITY AND RISKS OF THE CAPER, THEY WANT TO GET OUT OF IT ALIVE AND ARE BLUFFING IN PRESENTING MANY OF THEIR DEMANDS AND DEADLINES. HE IS THEREFORE PREPARED TO MOVE SLOWLY, TO ASSEMBLE INFORMATION,

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TO ALLOW OPTIONS TO DEVELOP AND TO ASSESS SITUATION CAREFULLY BEFORE TAKING DECISIVE ACTION. THERE IS AT THIS TIME NO SIGN OF IMPENDING ASSAULT ON THE VENEZUELAN CONSULATE; SECURITY FORCES IN THE AREA ARE NOW DISPOSED IN NON-PROVOCATIVE FORMATION. THIS SELF-ASSURANCE, COMBINED WITH WHAT IS EVIDENTLY DEEP CONCERN ON THE PART OF THE PRESIDENT FOR THE SAFETY OF PAO HUTCHISON AND OTHER HOSTAGES, AND THE MOOD HE DISPLAYED IN

THE AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH HIM, LEAD US TO BELIEVE THAT AN ASSAULT ON THE CONSULATE OR OTHER PRECIPITATE ACTIONS ARE NOT NOW INTENDED UNLESS THERE ARE INDICATIONS OF MISTREATMENT OF THE HOSTAGES. AT THE SAME TIME, BALAGUER HAS A HARD APPROACH TOWARD THE KIDNAPPER'S DEMANDS, UNDOUBTEDLY INFLUENCED BY THE ATTITUDE OF THE MILITARY WHO ARE NOW PROVED RIGHT IN HAVING OPPOSED THE PRESIDENT'S ACTION OF RELEASING MENDEZ VARGAS LAST JANUARY AND BY THE RECOGNITION THAT SUBSTANTIAL CONCESSIONS TO THE KIDNAPPERS WOULD BE INTERPRETED AS A SIGN OF WEAKNESS IN DEALING WITH RADICAL LEFT PRESSURES AND WOULD SERVE AS ENCOURAGEMENT FOR FURTHER EXTREMIST VIOLENCE. IN ANY CASE, IT IS PROBABLE THAT AFTER THE CURRENT SITUATION IS RESOLVED, NO MATTER WHAT THE OUTCOME, BALAGUER WILL TAKE STRONG MEASURES AGAINST LEFTIST ELEMENTS.

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SCCT-02 IO-14 SY-04 USSS-00 FBIE-00 A-01

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FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 1583

INFO AMEMBASSY CARACAS NIACT IMMEDIATE

USUN NEW YORK NIACT IMMEDIATE 0283

AMEMBASSY MEXICO CITY NIACT IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 SANTO DOMINGO 3981

6. THE TERRORISTS' BEHAVIOR, HOWEVER, IS A MUCH MORE UNCERTAIN ELEMENT. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE IN THE CASE OF RADHAMES MENDEZ VARGAS, A CONVICTED HIJACKER WITH A CLINICAL RECORD OF MENTAL INSTABILITY. IN LIGHT OF THIS BACKGROUND, IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO ESTIMATE WITH ANY ASSURANCE HOW HE MIGHT REACT UNDER THE INCREASING STRESS OF SIEGE, THOUGH HIS COLLEAGUES CONCEIVABLY WOULD ACT AS A MORE RATIONAL,

RESTRAINING INFLUENCE. AS OF THIS WRITING, TWO DEADLINES HAVE PASSED, ONE--WHICH EXPIRED AT NOON TODAY--CONVEYED TO THE AMBASSADOR, AND THE OTHER--WHICH EXPIRED AT 5 P.M.--IN A STATEMENT GIVEN IN A RADIO INTERVIEW. THE EXPIRATION OF THESE DEADLINES WITHOUT FULFILLMENT OF THE TERRORISTS' THREATS SERVES TO REINFORCE THE JUDGMENT OF THE PRESIDENT THAT THE TERRORISTS ARE NOT LIKELY TO ACT IN A MANNER WHICH WOULD RECKLESSLY SACRIFICE THEIR OWN LIVES. THE TERRORISTS MUST ALSO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE EVIDENT DETERMINATION OF THE GOVERNMENT TO RETALIATE DRASTICALLY AGAINST THEM AND THEIR COLLEAGUES IF THE HOSTAGES ARE HARMED.

7. THE GOVERNMENT'S CURRENT POSITION SEEMS TO BE ONE OF "A LIFE FOR A LIFE" I.E. IF HOSTAGES ARE KILLED, THE CAPTORS WILL
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SUFFER THE SAME FATE; IF THE HOSTAGES ARE FREED, CAPTORS WILL BE GIVEN SAFE CONDUCT OUT OF COUNTRY. FREEDOM OF JAILED PRISONERS OR PAYMENT OF RANSOM SEEMS TO BE RULED OUT. THERE IS NO DISPOSITION TO ENTER INTO A DIALOGUE WITH THE CAPTORS OR IN ANY OTHER WAY TAKE STEPS THAT THE GOVERNMENT BELIEVES MIGHT REFLECT WEAKNESS ON ITS PART. THE GOVERNMENT APPEARS CONVINCED THAT IN THIS GAME OF "CHICKEN" THE CAPTORS WILL WILT UNDER THE PRESSURE OF NO COMMUNICATIONS, LITTLE FOOD AND ABSENCE OF OVERTURES ON THE GOVERNMENT'S PART. IN SHORT, THE GOVERNMENT APPEARS TO BE SEEKING A "BANGKOK" SOLUTION.

8. IN THE EVENT THE GOVERNMENT'S JUDGMENT SHOULD PROVE WRONG AND THE CAPTORS START KILLING HOSTAGES AT INTERVALS, ONE BY ONE, IT WOULD SEEM REASONABLE TO SUPPOSE THAT HUTCHISON, AS THE MOST VALUABLE, WOULD NOT BE AMONG THE FIRST. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, OUR ABILITY TO BRING THE GOVERNMENT'S POLICY INTO SERIOUS QUESTION WOULD BE ENHANCED (OUR ABILITY TO DO SO NOW IS VIRTUALLY NIL SINCE THE TWO UNFULFILLED ULTIMATA SUPPORT THE GOVERNMENT'S CONTENTIONS). ON THE OTHER HAND, THE DOMINICAN MILITARY WOULD BE EVEN LESS DISPOSED TO BE CONCILIATORY TOWARD THE CAPTORS SHOULD ONE OF THE HOSTAGES BE KILLED.

9. OUR VIEW IS THAT, GIVEN THE EMOTIONAL INSTABILITY OF MENDEZ VARGAS, THE GOVERNMENT'S CONVICTION THAT THE CAPTORS WILL GIVE UP THEIR DEMANDS WITHOUT HARMING THE HOSTAGES IS TOO SANGUINE. WE DO NOT RPT NOT, HOWEVER, THINK THAT HUTCHISON IS AT THIS POINT IN IMMINENT DANGER OR THAT THE CAPTORS WILL PROBABLY ACT DRASTICALLY AGAINST THE OTHER HOSTAGES OVER THE NEXT TWELVE HOURS. AS TIME WEARS ON AND THE PRESSURE INCREASES, HOWEVER, THERE WOULD SEEM TO US TO BE A SUBSTANTIAL CHANCE THAT MENDEZ MIGHT LASH OUT IN A BRUTAL MANNER. IT'S DIFFICULT TO JUDGE WHETHER IT'S A 50-50 CHANCE OR LESS--PROBABLY NOT MORE.

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